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ABSTRACT

The Right to Read campaign is a national effort to eliminate illiteracy by 1980 and is funded by federal, state, local, and private contributions. First, it seeks to focus national attention on the fact that close to nineteen million adults and seven million children in the United States are functionally illiterate. Second, Right to Read is trying to encourage, coordinate, and facilitate efforts by government (federal, state, and local), industry, foundations, public interest groups, professional associations, schools, and adult training centers to improve reading instruction for all age groups. Right to Read has produced measurable results in its first three years. It has (1) funded school and community-based demonstration projects, (2) provided seed money to help state educational agencies develop and implement statewide Right to Read progams, and (3) coordinated its efforts with other Office of Education programs to provide greater impact on the nation's reading problems. (A summary of Right to Read programs and projects is given.) (TO)

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Education Briefing Paper

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T. H. Bell, *Commissioner*

August 1974

THE RIGHT TO READ

The Right To Read campaign is a national effort to eliminate illiteracy. It involves State, local, private, and Federal contributions. The Right To Read program in the Office of Education is part of this larger effort. With a $12 million appropriation this year and $12 million requested for fiscal 1975, it has two outsized responsibilities.

First, it seeks to focus national attention on the fact that close to 19 million adults and 7 million children in the United States are functionally illiterate. This means that some 26 million Americans lack the single most important skill for coping with life in a technological society. The situation is brought home forcefully by comparison with other countries. American high school graduates read less well than graduates in 12 other nations.

Second, and more important, Right To Read is trying to encourage, coordinate, and facilitate efforts by government (Federal, State, and local), industry, foundations, public interest groups, professional associations, schools, and adult training centers to improve reading instruction for all age groups. The goal of the combined effort is to eliminate illiteracy nationwide by 1980.

FIRST 3 YEARS

For the first 2 years, Right To Read received its funds from nine pieces of legislation; then in 1972, it was put under the Cooperative Research Act. Right To Read has produced measurable results in its first 3 years. It has (1) funded school and community-based demonstration projects, (2) provided seed money to help State education agencies develop and implement statewide Right To Read programs, and (3) coordinated its efforts with other Office of Education programs to provide greater impact on the Nation's reading problems.

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DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Right To Read's 106 school-based projects have provided specially planned reading programs for students from kindergarten through high school. Its 74 community-based projects have demonstrated reading programs for school dropouts, the unemployed, welfare mothers, and prison inmates.

Although students directly involved clearly benefit, the real purpose of the demonstration projects has been (1) to develop systematic plans for a reading program which would involve the entire school, and (2) to test new combinations of teaching methods and materials, the findings of which can be offered with confidence to other school districts and adult training centers throughout the country.

Staff development has been heavily emphasized because student achievement depends so much on the ability of instructors to identify student needs and develop individualized reading programs to meet them. Right To Read's national staff has developed a needs assessment instrument and other materials to assist projects in identifying problem areas and evaluating student progress. Both the national staff and approximately 90 Right To Read consultants, experts in reading and curriculum development, have provided technical assistance to Right To Read program sites across the country.

SPECIAL READING PROJECTS

Right To Read also administers 51 projects to establish quality reading programs in an integrated setting for minority and other children under the Emergency School Aid Act of 1972. More than 1,000 school faculties have been trained to serve nearly 35,000 children. These projects are designed to achieve gains of 1 to 1.5 years in word recognition, vocabulary, and other communication skills among 70 to 80 percent of participating students.

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

As a result of Right To Read funding, State education agencies are working with 1,227 local school districts serving over 37 million children. Thirty-one States have joined the Right To Read effort. This means they have made statewide surveys of teacher training and

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student reading needs and developed appropriate action plans. These plans are now in various stages of implementation, including training workshops for local Right To Read directors. Indicative of State commitment, 20 governors have issued proclamations making Right To Read a statewide educational priority.

NATIONAL PROGRAM IMPACT

Right To Read has encouraged other Office of Education programs to put special emphasis on reading instruction, whether a program's major focus is dropout prevention, bilingual education, handicapped children, or some other priority. Thus, despite its modest funding level, Right To Read impacts on programs that channel $500 million a year into educational reform under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Education for the Handicapped Act, Vocational Education Act, and other legislation.

In addition, other agencies and programs--U.S. Department of Defense, Action, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Job Corps, and Volunteers in Education--are seeking ways to incorporate Right To Read concepts and resources into their educational components.

Forty-five professional organizations, representing teachers, school administrators, librarians, and others, have been briefed on the national Right To Read effort. Of these, 25 groups have been selected by Right To Read for continuing discussions on how they can work together to reach common goals.

NEW PRIORITIES

This year Right To Read moved to strengthen the role of State education agencies, recognizing that better reading programs in all schools require statewide initiatives and support. Grants to States are on a competitive basis, with the hope that all States and territories will develop plans suitable for funding.

Having completed their 3-year mission to develop and test effective teaching methods and materials for implementation, 68 of 106 local school-based demonstration projects and about half the community-based projects are being phased into operations based on local funds.

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Other Right To Read priorities this year include the development of (1) Adult Literacy Academies, (2) two TV instructional series for adults, and (3) nationwide dissemination to schools and adult training centers of techniques and materials validated by the demonstration projects.

ADULT LITERACY ACADEMIES

The academies are envisioned as a Peace Corps for literacy. College students, young working adults, retired persons, and others will be recruited and trained as volunteer tutors to devote a few hours each week toward helping illiterate adults learn to read. The training of the tutors for adults will take place in Tutor Training Service Centers, and the tutoring will take place in schools, churches, office buildings, and community centers.

Colleges and universities are encouraged to give credit to students interested in serving as tutors, and business firms are encouraged to grant released time to employees to serve.

The academies will be funded and administered through the National Right To Read Office. Beginning with Right To Read support in a few States, Right To Read hopes that all States ultimately will assume the installation and support of Literacy Academies.

TV PROGRAMING

Right To Read will fund production of two televised teaching-of-reading programs, each consisting of 25 half-hour lessons. One series will be aimed at English-speaking adults, the other at Spanish-speaking adult learners. Augmenting both series will be teachers' guides, student workbooks, and other printed materials.

The learning programs will be made available in reel-to-reel and video-cassette form to public TV stations and to public and private agencies involved in adult reading activities. Right To Read's own adult projects and those of the Division of Adult Education will serve as sites to test and evaluate the pilot programs.

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DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Making successful Right To Read approaches and materials available to every school district that wants them is a major program objective over the next 12 to 15 months. As a necessary first step, a nationally known research institute is engaged in identifying, validating, and providing multimedia packaging of up to 25 successful reading projects. Packages should be available for distribution during the 1974-75 school year.

For further information:

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